

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN SELECT BOARD
REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of December 10, 2019

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth W. Goslant, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Jenn Wood (Green Mountain Transit), Kelly Stoddard-Poor (AARP Vermont), Lydia Petty (Northfield Common Connections), Bonnie Donahue (Northfield Common Connections), Anne B. Donahue (Vermont State Representative), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), John Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), Jean Kerner (Northfield Community Development Network), Ted Fisher (Northfield Energy Committee), Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Bethany Drum, Scott Neun, Dan Sivori, Steve Davis, Kelli Cheney, Heather Devine, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)

- a. Jenn Wood, Green Mountain Transit (GMT): Update.** Prior to Ms. Wood's presentation, Chair Maxwell announced that the Select Board has decided to put the \$21,000 funding article for the Northfield-Montpelier Commuter Bus directly on the 2020 Town Meeting Warning without the need to petition. Northfield residents thus will be able to vote by Australian Ballot whether or not to continue their support for this service.

Ms. Wood is GMT's Public Affairs & Community Relations Manager and she said a recent GMT development is that it now has a state-approved charter. This means GMT technically is no longer a non-profit organization but instead has the same status as a municipality. GMT currently provides public transportation service to about half the state with the rest of Vermont served by other transit agencies. The \$21,000 that will be voted upon by residents represents the twenty percent (20%) local match amount. This amount has remained the same for the past six (6) years and the remaining operating costs are paid for by state and/or federal grant funds. In their written request to have the article put on the ballot, GMT said the commuter bus ridership had increased 9.3% during fiscal year 2018/2019. Ms. Wood noted there had been a twenty-five percent (25%) decrease in ridership during the current fiscal year. GMT is trying to address this problem by working with Norwich University (NU) on an agreement that would allow NU students unlimited rides on GMT buses in return for a bulk payment from the university. In addition, Ms. Wood said GMT is continuing to work with Darn Tough Vermont (Cabot Hosiery) to adjust bus schedules to better match their work shifts, etc. GMT also is conducting a system-wide route analysis to determine whether some routes need to be altered, eliminated, or when better marketing is needed. When completed, this document will show the actual costs of operating each bus route.

Chair Maxwell said the Northfield Energy Committee (NEC) and other local community members have been taking active steps to publicize the commuter bus services with the goal of increasing ridership. Chair Maxwell is in support of public transportation. He asked if Northfield voters decide in favor of the GMT funding article on Town Meeting Day, would there be a commitment to maintain the current bus schedule. Ms. Wood said it is a long process to make significant changes in bus schedules and she did not foresee any changes for the commuter bus service in the near future. Board member Goodrich asked if there was any consideration of providing smaller, more fuel-efficient buses for lower ridership routes. Ms. Wood said this is being evaluated as part of the system-wide route analysis. There also is the possibility of electric buses becoming part of the GMT fleet. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Wood for the valuable information provided tonight.

- b. **Lydia Petty, Bonnie Kirn Donahue, & Kelly Stoddard-Poor: AARP Vermont Mini-Grant Update (Northfield Common Connections).** Ms. Petty, who was part of the group (Northfield Placemaking Committee) that applied for and received \$3,000 grant for AARP Vermont, introduced Kelly Stoddard-Poor who serves as AARP Vermont's Outreach Coordinator. Ms. Stoddard-Poor said it is AARP's mission to improve the quality of life for older adults and an important part of this is working to reduce the numbers of housebound senior citizens. She noted about ten percent (10%) of seniors only leave their homes about once a week and about a third (33%) rely on others for transportation as they no longer drive themselves, have disabilities, etc. In order to prevent further isolation in the home, AARP supports programs that allow seniors greater mobility in their neighborhoods by making them more pedestrian-friendly. Important to this is the concept of "complete streets," which means public roads should have proper provisions for automobile, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic. Ms. Stoddard-Poor said Northfield was awarded the mini-grant due to its strong proposal and added it has been enjoyable to work with Ms. Petty, Ms. Donahue, and other Northfield participants in this project. The "Walk Audit" held last June (06/18/19) was a very positive event that demonstrated local support for these efforts. Ms. Stoddard-Poor said Northfield provides many opportunities for such programs with its thriving downtown, adjacent senior housing, etc. and she looks forward to continuing this partnership.

Ms. Petty agreed the walk audit had been a success with over twenty (20) residents navigating Northfield streets and sidewalks from the Brown Public Library to Mayo Healthcare, which is just over half a mile. Ms. Petty said walkers saw the fairly-recent sidewalk improvements around Depot Square but the situation changed when walking along Wall Street where the sidewalk often is missing or in poor condition. In addition, there is a poorly-marked railroad crossing and a poorly-placed crosswalk near the Senior Center. She said walkers were pleased when they arrived at the new Dog River Park on Water Street as much work went into making this an attractive nature park. There also was overall good driver behavior during the walk though it was noted some motorists didn't actually come to full stops when turning right at stop signs.

Ms. Donahue said after the walk audit, her group met with over fifteen (15) local organizations to discuss how to better connect the downtown area to Dog River Park. A follow up event ("Take a Walk to Dog River Park") was held on a Saturday morning in August (08/10/19) and made use of the mini-grant funds to create temporary signage linking Depot Square to Dog River Park. A green lane was created with washable paint a couple days beforehand but unfortunately a strong summer shower the day before left only a faint trace by Saturday morning. Chalk drawings were hurriedly put down before the event, which would have over one hundred (100) participants. Also added along the route were 150 painted marker stakes; historical signage with old photographs and explanatory text; hand-painted cardboard signs with various images of dogs; youth-built painted benches, etc. Ms. Donahue said the participants reacted very well to the temporary signage along the route and once arriving at the park they were greeted with various informational displays, games, live music, free ice cream, etc. Ms. Donahue said it was a very successful event and it could not have come off so well without the support of the municipality.

Ms. Petty said a report on these events was provided at a Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) meeting recently and the response was very positive. There will be another presentation at an AARP Vermont gathering in May 2020. In the interim, Ms. Donahue said Northfield Common Connections has some recommendations to make regarding deficiencies discovered during the walking events, broken down into short-, medium-, and long-term categories. The short-term recommendations are to install an ADA-compliant parking spot at Dog River Park and improved pedestrian safety signage along Wall Street (including a new crosswalk sign and more visible signage for the railroad crossing). The medium-term recommendations include providing temporary signage from Northfield Common indicating the way to Dog River Park and putting down a painted pedestrian lane on Wall Street where sidewalk is absent. The long-term goal would be to install ADA-compliant sidewalk along Wall Street where it is either inadequate or non-existent. Ms. Petty and Ms. Donahue are more than willing to work with the municipality to achieve these goals.

Manager Schulz said the short-term goals certainly can be accomplished without much delay with already budgeted funds. The new sidewalk probably will require much planning and grant funds to achieve. Manager Schulz added the focus in the coming year will be on South Main Street as grant funds have been obtained to partially fund the installation of new sidewalk on the west side of the street.

Ms. Stoddard-Poor said she is encouraging Ms. Petty and Ms. Donahue to apply for an AARP national grant, which can run from \$5,000 to \$20,000. The national office in Washington, DC makes the award decisions and such Vermont communities as Bennington and Newport have been awarded grants. Bennington was provided funds to renovate a public park and Newport to create a multi-use path that would connect the downtown area to a lakeside beach. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Stoddard-Poor, Ms. Petty, and Ms. Donahue for their past efforts, their presentation tonight, and for their positive vision of how Northfield can be made a more walkable community.

- c. **State Representatives Anne B. Donahue and Kenneth W. Goslant: 2019/2020 Vermont Legislative Session Priorities.** Representatives Donahue and Goslant first thanked the Select Board members for providing them with the opportunity to address the people of Northfield before the state legislature opens its next session in early January 2020. Representative Donahue said the issues the legislature will be focused upon that would most affect municipalities are proposals to raise the minimum wage and expand paid family leave. Another contentious issue is how to tax marijuana public sales and whether Vermont towns will have the authority to ban open commercial sales (i.e. “pot shops”) in their communities. Representative Donahue personally would like more emphasis in the upcoming session on making sure Vermonters have better access to healthcare but this issue seems to have faded in the public attention.

Manager Schulz asked if the legislature has any plans to increase the amount of funding available for Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) structures grants. He noted Northfield has a number of aging bridges that require significant attention in the near future. Representative Donahue said the transportation budget has a different format than other state budgets as it has its own revenue stream with gasoline taxes, various licensing fees, etc. The usual practice is for the Governor’s Office to make spending recommendations that then go to the full legislature for final approval.

Representative Goslant said “Clean Water” issues will become priorities in the next legislative session as there will be aggressive efforts to protect our waterways from stormwater runoff, etc. New requirements should be accompanied by an increase in the amount of funding available for local projects. There should be a lot in the works as there are great concerns about protecting Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River. As the process is just starting, it is hard to foresee how much can be achieved in the next year or so. Representatives Donahue and Goslant both are willing to return in a few months after the legislature committees have started meeting in order to provide a better picture of what this legislative session will be able to accomplish. It was agreed that a lot of work needs to be done.

Chair Maxwell said a major concern for municipalities like Northfield that are starting work on their FY 2020/2021 budgets is how high an increase to expect when the statewide school tax rate is set next year. He asked if the legislators had any insight on this. Representative Donahue said it is hard to predict the exact amount given the many factors involved but right now a six percent (6%) increase is anticipated. Chair Maxwell then thanked both representatives for the valuable information provided tonight and he looks forward to another presentation next spring.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **November 26, 2019 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **December 3, 2019 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #11-20.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve Warrant #11-20 in the amount of \$480,334.79. Board member Doney asked about a "SQRP Penalty" in the amount of \$1,062. Manager Schulz said the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) monitors utilities like the Northfield Electric Department (NED) regarding the number of power outages each year and imposes a penalty if the total exceeds a certain limit. Apparently NED exceeded the limit and was penalized this amount. The affected utility can turn this penalty into a donation to a local non-profit so CERV was the recipient of the \$1,062. Chair Maxwell believes NED has very few outages so PUC must have a low threshold for what is permissible. He added NED's aggressive tree-trimming policy contributes to the relatively low number of outages. Carolyn Stevens works with CERV and she said they certainly are thankful for the donation. Board member Goslant noted of the total warrant amount, about \$224,557 was spent buying power for NED and another \$58,560 was used to purchase Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) stock. Chair Maxwell noted purchasing VELCO stock usually is a solid investment as it normally returns about twelve percent (12%) in interest income each year. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 1, 2019.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$104,794.95. Board member Goodrich asked about a \$4,095 payment for Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) "Training Pay." Manager Schulz said at the end of each calendar year, NAS EMTs are compensated for the amount of time they spent in training sessions throughout the year. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Northfield Road Erosion Inventory.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont state legislature passed the Vermont Clean Water Initiative (Act 64) in 2015 in part to encourage municipalities to identify and reduce the amount of stormwater runoff coming off paved and gravel roads. The ultimate goal is to reduce the amount of pollutants reaching Lake Champlain. In addition to collecting a \$1,800 annual fee from each municipality, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) also requires them to compile a Road Erosion Inventory Report that identifies which public roads have the worst runoff problems as well as create a plan to address these concerns. With the assistance of state grant funds, Northfield worked with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) to draft the current report which is based on information collected in the summer of 2018. The report lists twenty (20) road segments with runoff problems that are considered high priority and must be addressed within the next five (5) years. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) does provide state funding to deal with these problems and in the past couple years Northfield received over \$75,000 for projects on Colson Road, Barrows Road, Terry Hill Road, and Dole Hill Road. Chair Maxwell asked if the Select Board's decision last year to significantly increase the gravel/stone budget had any positive impact on this situation. Manager Schulz said the increased amount of road material put on the backroads really didn't directly address stormwater runoff. Really dealing the problem requires the installation of new culverts and other infrastructure work that will properly divert untreated stormwater away from streams, rivers, etc. Board member Goslant confirmed the state legislature considers protection of Lake Champlain a top priority. He suggested the Highway Subcommittee members should keep attention to this matter. Board member Miller noted the Highway Department budget will be discussed at a special meeting this coming Saturday (12/14/19) and he will have some suggestions regarding stormwater runoff at that time. He does have some questions about the table indicating which roads have the most problems. Manager Schulz will get some clarification before the meeting. He did note Northfield already has completed four (4) projects to mitigate stormwater runoff with at least one more planned for the near future. Therefore, we seem to be a bit ahead of most Vermont municipalities in this regard.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Northfield Police Department (NPD) Vehicle Fleet.** Board member Goodrich asked for an update on how many NPD vehicles now are in service. Manager Schulz said the 2017 Ford Explorer recently was totaled in an accident so we are back to three (3) usable vehicles. Board member Goslant noted this includes the 2014 Ford Explorer that has many problems. He asked how much we should get back in insurance for replacing the 2017 vehicle. Manager Schulz said about \$18,000 due to the deductible and depreciation. A new Ford Explorer should cost about \$40,000. However, even though the vehicle was totaled most of the installed police equipment should be salvageable. Board member Goodrich said if the NPD fleet is down to three (3), we shouldn't allow any to be used by officers going to and from training sessions, etc. Manager Schulz confirmed in such cases the NPD officers will be expected to use their personal vehicles.
- b. Winter Salt/Sand Distribution Policy.** Chair Maxwell asked if there is a policy that puts a threshold in place for the amount of snowfall required before the roads are salted and/or sanded. Manager Schulz believes this is specified in the municipality's "Winter Road Maintenance Policy" that was jointly approved by the Town Selectmen and Village Trustees in November 2013. He noted there sometimes are exceptions to the rules on certain roads due to their terrain, etc. Since the policy is over six (6) years old, perhaps the Highway Subcommittee should review it in case it needs updating.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz said the RFP for this project is being developed. He noted a cursory engineering study was done last year in order to attach an estimated project cost (\$1,700,000) to the bond vote article. However, we are proceeding in a deliberate manner in preparing the RFP in order to ensure the project is done properly with no chance of work delays, cost overruns, etc.
- b. Highway Department Winter Preparations.** Manager Schulz said the Highway crew responded to a significant winter snowstorm during the last payroll period, which resulted in overtime expense. As a cost-saving measure, a part-time plow driver has been hired who will help out during bad snowstorms. Manager Schulz also reported there are no major issues with Highway equipment. In addition, about 3,500 cubic yards of winter sand had been stockpiled before the storm (though some of it was used then). Manager Schulz also said two to three (2-3) loads of road salt has been brought into town. Due to the small size of the current salt shed, a large stockpile can't be put down but we don't expect any material shortages this coming winter.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

XI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Goslant, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were amended and approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 14, 2020